

Pickens Technical College

Aurora, Colorado

Focus on Middle College Program

Colorado Innovation Profile

Colorado's Career and Technical Education programs are developing a seamless system of education that ensures ease in student transition from one educational system to another and from one level of instruction to another.

There are eight key strategies that Colorado CTE teachers and administrators are applying:

- *Implementing Career and Technical Education Plans of Study;*
- *Strengthening Accountability for Results;*
- *Moving to a Project-Based Focus for Local Planning and Implementation;*
- *Assessing Career and Technical Skills;*
- *Integrating Academic and CTE Skills and Knowledge;*
- *Transforming Professional Development, Recruitment and Retention of CTE Teachers;*
- *Ensuring Effective Instruction and Strategies for Special Populations; and*
- *Connecting CTE to Employers and Workforce Priorities.*

The Colorado Community College System has prepared a series of "Innovation Profiles" that describe how Colorado's schools, community colleges and community partners are creating innovative strategies to improve their programs on behalf of students.

Key Innovation Activity

Related Strategy: Implementing Career and Technical Education Plans of Study

For its high school students, Pickens Technical College (PTC) now offers a 'Middle College Program' which is a systematized way for enrolled high school students to simultaneously earn: a high school diploma, a PTC program certificate, and credits toward an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree from Community College of Aurora (CCA).

Background

PTC is a Career and Technical Education college offering training programs to adults and high school students. The college is part of both the Aurora Public Schools and the Colorado Community College System, and offers its students nearly 50 certificate programs ranging from Dental Assisting to Landscaping.

Start-up Planning

The concept of a middle college at Pickens Technical College was initially envisioned by the school's previous director Art Bogardus, who had monitored the middle college movement for nearly a decade. Formal planning and development for the Middle College at Pickens Tech (MC@PTC) program was initiated the fall prior to its launch. In the early phase, PTC contracted with a consultant to gather existing research, update it and apply it to the technical college setting, develop a course-sequence model, tie up the loose ends, and identify the policies or processes that would need to be addressed within the Aurora Public Schools.

Middle College requires a serious commitment. Students attend one or more information sessions with their parent(s), complete an application, take the Community College *Accuplacer* assessment and submit their scores. Applicants' grades, attendance and teacher recommendations are reviewed, and each student participates in personal interviews. In 2007, of about 400 high school students who attended PTC, thirteen students were accepted for the pilot program, committing to participate in the Middle College for the next two years.

One senior from the initial cohort (grandfathered into the program's second year since he had completed a year at PTC already) graduated in Spring of 2008 with the entire Middle College prize package: his high school diploma, PTC program certificates and his AAS. The rest of the group members were assessed at year-end for their college readiness. Students who did not stay on target with their academics and personal success skills will return to their home high schools to complete their senior year; the majority who demonstrated their readiness skills will be continuing their PTC programs and taking college classes at CCA in the fall of 2008 while a new incoming group begins their PreCollegiate classes. The original design is to select 26 new entrants for the 2008-2009 school year, then increase the entry class to 50 new students in 2009-2010, and cap the program at about 100 new students in 2010-11.

Middle College Eligibility

Not every student who attends PTC is eligible for the Middle College program. Students must be on track academically, having passed all or most of their freshman and sophomore classes. If they have not done so, the students can't afford class time for PTC programs because they would need to make up credits they lost during those years.

One implementation challenge is disseminating the Middle College information to students early enough so they can plan their high school program to include PTC programs and Middle College at Pickens Tech. Aurora Public Schools is looking to infuse career awareness throughout its K-12 curriculum, but has not yet done so. A more intensive "information blitz" strategy is planned for the 2008-09 school year in order to inform freshman, sophomore, and hopefully even 8th grade students *and* their parents about the available PTC and Middle College opportunities; the purpose of this outreach is to help students make their academic preparation much more intentional early in their high school experience.

Providing On-campus College Experience

Students begin getting the "college feel" as soon as they begin their CTE courses at Pickens, since most of the PTC certificate programs enroll both high school and adult students. This is clearly **not** a high

school environment. High school students work side by side with—and even compete against—adult students throughout their PTC experience.

Students then take their courses for the Community College of Aurora at CCA’s CentreTech Campus even though those courses could probably be offered at the PTC campus. The Middle College design emphasizes the importance of students getting involved in the college experience and beginning to see themselves as college students – not just in the future, but in the here and now. The Middle College program also offers flexibility to students, giving them the option of taking their community college courses in the afternoon or evening, depending on the specific course offerings. This allows students to work around employment, high school activities, and other responsibilities.

Recruiting to the Middle College Model

One of the biggest challenges is recruiting students because the Middle College is still a new program and the program is such a major departure from the typical high school options. While students are not “pouring in,” the Middle College staff is working closely with Aurora high school counselors from the district’s five high schools, so they can talk to the sophomores who already want to come to PTC. The next target audiences are freshmen and their parents, so planning begins earlier and students can better prepare themselves for the MC@ PTC commitment.

Middle College ultimately appeals to students who want to pursue a CTE program **and** attend college while they’re still in high school. Students can do either—or both—without joining the Middle College. But [MC@PTC](#) provides an additional support system for students who, perhaps as the first college attendees in their homes, may be complete strangers to the college environment and the academic, personal discipline and student success skills it takes to succeed in college once they get there, the Middle College program helps students *build* their skills during their junior year and then continues to support them while they *practice* those skills in college classes during their senior year.

Scheduling Sequence of Courses

Students who enroll in [MC@PTC](#) completely change the look of their final two years of high school. In their junior year, [MC@PTC](#) students spend the majority of their day on the PTC campus. They spend over two and a half hours in their chosen PTC program and then stay on campus for the two core Middle College-only classes: PreCollegiate Math and PreCollegiate English. By agreement with the school district, these classes are aligned with community college developmental education coursework rather than with the traditional 11th grade math and English curriculum. Students are then bused to their home high schools where they are able to take up to two additional classes needed for their graduation requirements.

Here is a sample schedule:

Junior Year, Sem 1

<i>Per.</i>	<i>Class & Location</i>
1-4	Pickens Program / PTC
5	PreCollegiate English / PTC
6	PreCollegiate Math / PTC
7-8	Additional classes / Home HS

Junior Year, Sem 2

<i>Per.</i>	<i>Class & Location</i>
1-4	Pickens Program / PTC
5	PreCollegiate English / PTC
6	PreCollegiate Math / PTC
7-8	Additional classes / Home HS

During their senior year of Middle College, students' time is spent predominantly at PTC completing their chosen CTE programs and at CCA completing general education courses (which some students may begin during the 2nd semester of their junior year). Per the statewide articulated agreement, a maximum of 45 credits from PTC can be applied toward the 60-credit Associates of Applied Science (AAS) degree at any Colorado community college. The number of transferable credits varies depending on the PTC certificate program. A minimum of 15 credits must be earned at the community college to meet the 60-credit minimum requirement for the AAS degree. Students are also cautioned that the *credits from PTC that are accepted toward the AAS degree earned at CCA will likely not transfer to 4-year baccalaureate degree programs.*

Senior Year, Sem 1

<i>Per.</i>	<i>Class & Location</i>
1-4	Pickens Program / PTC
5	College English / CCA
6	College Math / CCA
7-8	Add'l classes, if needed /HS

Senior Year, Sem 2

<i>Per.</i>	<i>Class & Location</i>
1-4	Pickens Program / PTC
5	College Speech / CCA
6	College Science / CCA
7-8	College Soc. Studies / CCA

Key Factors in Implementation

Targeting Students with CTE Interests

As leaders from PTC envision the Middle College Program, their strategic purpose is to create a totally different high school experience where a student with a strong interest in career and technical education studies can also earn a postsecondary credential while still in high school or shortly after graduation. The target audience for the Middle College programs is students who want to take PTC certificate programs, but don't necessarily already have a specific college plan. As such, PTC staff members actively recruit sophomores who have already expressed their intention to take a PTC program beginning in their junior year. Pickens Middle College staff members explain to students the structure and sequence of the Middle College program and the opportunity it provides to earn a significant number of postsecondary credits.

Building College Readiness & Academic Skills

Beginning in their junior year of high school, Middle College students are accepted to enroll in an approved PTC program comprising nearly three hours of class time a day. Typically during their junior and senior years, PTC students return to their home school to take required academic courses like reading and math. But, in the Middle College program, English and mathematics are offered on the Pickens Tech campus. Based on the Accuplacer college placement test the students take prior to entering the Middle College, they generally take "pre-collegiate" developmental math and English for at least the first semester of their Middle College program; that prepares them for college level math and English while introducing them to college expectations and the skills necessary to meet them. All the pre-collegiate and college-level math and English courses count toward the student's high school diploma requirements.

During their senior year of high school, students continue to take their technical courses through PTC, and the focus shifts toward earning more of the college academic credit required for the associate's degree.

In order to provide the pre-college math and English courses, PTC hired retired teachers as adjunct faculty to teach the math and language arts curriculum. Ideally, PTC plans to place no more than 20 to 25 students in each of the pre-collegiate courses. Through good screening, teachers provide instruction to a variety of levels with the goal of making sure students become eligible for college-level math and English.

In 2007-08, the classes were offered mid-day, in between the school's two shifts of technical courses, so there was no conflict with the rest of the school's schedule. However, the district's high school schedules changed for the 2008-09 school year, so the PreCollegiate courses now overlap with the afternoon PTC classes. That created a new, unexpected challenge which will need to be addressed as the program grows.

Offering Support Among Like-minded Peers

The benefit of being a part of the Middle College program is that the student joins a like-minded group of students who enjoy CTE programs but who would like some college experience, too. Middle College classmates become a "support group" to each other while they each complete a high school diploma, CTE program at Pickens, and an AAS degree at CCA.

Results

While still very early in implementation, positive results are being seen already. In the Spring of 2008 a Middle College @ Pickens Technical College student was one of the three students who earned their AAS degree from CCA, and then a few days later received a diploma from their high schools and a program certificate from Pickens Technical College.

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Contact Information

Mr. Dean Stecklein
Executive Director, Pickens Technical College
adstecklein@aps.k12.co.us

Ms. Lezlie Shirk
Assistant Director, Pickens Technical College
lmshirk@aps.k12.co.us
303-344-4910 #27726

500 Airport Boulevard, Aurora, CO 80011-9307, P: 303.344.4910

This Innovation Profile was created by **Meeder Consulting, LLC** (www.meederconsulting.com), a firm specializing in leadership and aligning education systems with workforce needs, on behalf of the Colorado Community College System (CCCS). CCCS administers and leads career and technical education in Colorado on behalf of secondary education, community colleges and other CTE providers. Information about CTE in Colorado can be found at www.cccs.edu and www.ColoradoStatePlan.com.